

The Music Lesson

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Summary: This is a response to The Disability Challenge on
OTL:):)

The Music Lesson

SPIFFY DISCLAIMER THINGIE!!!

I don't own them (mores the pity!); they're Marvel's and Ah'm usin' without permission:) :) Ah ain't makin' a plug nickel! If ya'll sue me Magnus is gonna be right peeved ...

Rated PG-17 for implied adult sexual content and violence. If either of those things bother ya'll then skedaddle:) :)

My special thanks to Alara Rogers for answering the OTL Disability Challenge. This story is a sequel to her story "Silence" and Ah am indebted to her for allowing me to write it:) :)

The Music Lesson A Tale Of Disability by Dannell Lites

I did not hear him, of course. But, then it *has* been a lifetime since I needed my ears to sense the approach of another. Bioelectric energy is quite detectable as it travels through the magnetosphere. So you see I am still not easy to surprise, deaf as I am.

But I was surprised to see my visitor, nonetheless. I expected that it might be Theresa, come for my weekly lesson in Sign, or perhaps Samuel or Danielle. These days they are my most frequent guests here in my Antarctic huddling place. Charles and his protÃ©gÃ© Ororo Monroe are infrequent visitors, true, but here was quite literally the very last person I had expected to see. I should have suspected, though. All that metal you see ... He has a very deep, distinctive voice if memory serves and it usually does. There was a time when I heard it often, raised in fury against me. I smiled and in my mind I heard it again. I really must be getting better at reading lips.

"Hiya Maggsie!" said Wolverine lighting one of his foul-smelling cheroots. He dropped the charred match at his feet and inhaled deeply.

He is still the only one I know who has the temerity to smoke in my presence. But, then he still calls Charles "Chuck", does he not? At the moment I did not feel very privileged by his left-handed mark of affection. I wrinkled my nose and Signed carefully, "No smoking!" with a great scowl on my face. Such an irritating man! He made no move to obey me; quite the opposite. His grin mocked me. I have a violent temper and it has grown no sweeter in these days of being treated as a simpleton by virtue of my disability. I am deaf not stupid. I have never been stupid; never.

"Love you, too!" Signed Logan slowly.

"And *I* have lost my hearing," I Signed emphatically back, "NOT my sense of smell! To what do I owe the dubious pleasure of this visit?" Even in Sign I can still be quite pompous when I set my mind to it. The arrogance comes naturally now, I fear, after so many years of diligent practice.

"Got a present for ya," my former enemy Signed and tossed a thin flat disc in my direction. At first I thought it a CD-ROM, but then I saw the colorful label of the thing and was vastly annoyed. His confidence in my ability to catch the thing was a compliment in it's own backward fashion. Somehow I did not feel flattered.

And then when I truly saw the garish label, lying in wait for my unsuspecting eyes, I gasped. Logan is expert at reading an opponents body language and mine must have been all too apparent but he did not resist. Reflexively I lashed out. He is quick as I have good reason to know but for me he is no real challenge. The man was wearing so much metal he should have clanked when he walked. And I ... I am *still* the Master of Magnetism. I am still Magneto. I have not yet learned to see myself as less than I am simply because I cannot hear. Not ... quite ...

Brutally, I slammed him time and again against the walls of my sanctuary, enraged. We had never been friends he and I, but this ... this was beyond mockery. We had been allies of a sort for a time and to be so viscously ridiculed by someone I had trusted, if not liked, was not in me. His healing factor is a truly wondrous thing is it not? Not once did he lose consciousness. Nor did he cry out. Not even once. I fear that I was the one who did that. I could feel the muscles of my throat work, the painful stretch of my increasingly unused vocal chords. I must have been roaring.

I could not, of course, hear myself.

Deliberately he wiped the blood from his mouth and nose, smiling at me still yet. But he said nothing. He is a strange man, Logan. I let the disc fall to the carpeted floor. Even before Thesesa stripped me of my dignity, plunging me into this thunderous silence I should not have heard it strike, I think. But I could still *see* it.

SYMPHONY #9 by LUDWIG VON BEETHOVEN, the label proudly declared.

A music CD ...

A *music* CD ...

I used my power to shake him like a rat in the mouth of a terrier. I laid hands on him and Signed my fury against his naked flesh. I was not gentle.

"Damn you, little man," I slapped at him, "Damn you!" My jaws ached from the set of my teeth. "Why?" I demanded flesh to flesh, "Why?" With a great heave he pushed me away and I expected to see his claws emerge even as I went careening across the room. I was almost looking forward to it, in fact ... But they did not. Pain is instructive, it is said. Indeed it is. Logan and I have given one another a great deal of instruction over the years it must be admitted. For long moments we simply stared, eyes locked in silent combat. He was the first to look away. Why was I so absurdly proud of that? Had I fallen so far that even so inconsequential and meaningless a victory brought such joy?

Apparently so.

With a visible grimace Logan climbed to his feet. His advance was slow but steady, utterly free of unexpected, threatening moves and alien to his nature. Wordlessly he crouched beside me. I saw his eyes then. I'm not sure what I thought to find there in those earthy depths. Anger perhaps? Pity, almost certainly. But neither of these slumbered there. What I did find devastated me. Understanding. His broken lip had healed but the salty metallic scent of blood lingered.

Blood ... so much blood ...

He took both my hands in his, carefully, almost reverently and studied them as a diamond cutter regards an uncut stone of great value. I resisted the urge to flinch and pull away from him. How could he know? I have always disliked to be touched against my will. It brings too much unpleasantness slithering in the wake of all it's pleasures. I have been ... touched ... too often, I fear.

"You got great hands, Magnus," my fellow mutant said. His eyes were hooded and unreadable. "Your hands 're made fer a musician."

I close my eyes. My hands ... People have always praised my hands ...

<"You have the hands of a great musician or a great lover." I hear my mother sigh. "Cherish them." She kisses my knuckles one by one. "Don't worry Erik! No one ever does 'Ode to Joy' proper justice, I'm afraid, " she informs me. "Now ran and play you naughty boy! You're heart isn't in the music today!" It never was.>

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_ <"You have clever hands, Jew-swine," the SS Gruppenfurther says pleasantly to me. "You come highly recommended by the Einsatzgruppen." I have not yet forgotten the sound of his laugh. "Did you really repair their stalled truck? No wonder they didn't shoot you ..." When I make no reply he slaps me to the floor and then kicks me. I cover my head and make myself very small. But he does not strike me again. Not yet. "No matter," he says and his voice is still pleasant as if he were congratulating his dog on a job well done. He

grasps my hands and pulls me brutally to my knees. "Such clever, pretty hands ..." He yanks my hair and forces me to look up at him. He is smiling like the sun. "Can you use them to keep machinery running, Jew-swine?" Still I say nothing until he pulls his gun from it's polished holster and rests the cold metal barrel against my head. "Answer me, Jew-filth. Will you use those clever hands to help me wipe the stench of you from the earth?" He cocks the trigger. "Beg me politely to let you help kill others like you and you will live." I do not hesitate. "Please let me help you wipe the stench of me from the earth," I beg him politely and tears run down my cheeks. But my voice is steady. It must be. "Good!" says the SS Gruppenfurther. "In the meantime we really must find another use for those talented hands ..." And, gun still to my head, he unbuttons his trousers.> _

_ Logan watched me closely. When he released me he offered up his own short blunt hands upon the alter of my inspection. Surprisingly, the nails are smooth and clean, not ragged as you might imagine. But the knuckles are gnarled and many times broken. This close I can see them clearly. They are not the hands of a gentle man. Criss-crossed with endless tiny scars, they are mute testaments to great pain and hard labor. Their touch is not soft. The calluses are deep and ragged raising up like soaring mountains. For a moment he stared at his hands as if he did not recognize them; almost as if they had somehow betrayed him. _

_ "I've got ugly hands," he says. "Damn things're only good for one thing." I can see the quick flare of his broad nostrils and it is no great trick to imagine his snort of derision. I looked up, watching his lips carefully for his reply. _

_ "Only thing I was ever good at." he says. He has fallen back upon his knowledge of Sign now. My eyes narrow. It is a small courtesy but a mysterious one. Logan is not a courteous man. Suspicion blossoms like a Spring flower but I beat it into submission as I would any other enemy. _

_ I hold my silence for many moments. But in the end I must know.

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_ "Why the Ninth Symphony?" I question him with agile fingers. What instinct led him to choose that particular composition with which to taunt me? If that is what he was doing. I am no longer sure of that. Why The Chorale Symphony? After all, he cannot know that it was the only one of all my Mother's gifts of music that I cherished, can he? He does not answer me right away. Instead he looks away seemingly lost in the labyrinth of a deep reverie. It takes him many moments to find his way out and I can only wonder what ghostly Minotaurs have pursued him. Finally, with a deep intake of breath he emerged triumphant. _

_ "Didja know Beethoven never heard it?" he Signs, a pleasant look straining the muscles of his face and my credulity. "The Ninth Symphony, I mean. Not a single note." _

_ <"Never heard it?" I'd been dumfounded. "What do you mean?" She is trying to kindle my waning interest in music. She wishes to share the joy she finds in music with me. I am young and don't understand the nature of her gift to me. My mother again stirs on the padded comfort of her velvet piano bench and looks at me strangely before she answers my childish question..> _

_ "Lots of people think that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony's the most beautiful and perfect piece o' music ever. Better'n Mozart even." Logan said. Perplexed, I nodded in agreement, reigning in my rapidly spiraling ire. I do not suffer fools willingly. Or lightly. What could be the purpose of his tactless "present" if not to hurt me?

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_ "And when he composed it," Logan continued, his lips moving softly, "Ol' Ludwig was deaf as a post ..." <"But *how*" I gasp at my mother, "*how* could anyone write such music if they couldn't hear it, Mama? I don't understand ..." Mama smiles and caresses the keys of the Steinway as if they could answer the question. And perhaps they can. For *her*.> _

_ It must be that my traitorous fingers gave me away echoing my thoughts. I am sure that I did not speak aloud. I rarely do that anymore. But there was Logan's answer, flowing like water through his hands. _

_ "I asked him that once, bub," the Canadian said as if to himself. "Know what he told me? He said, 'I'll hear it in Heaven ...'" _

_ "You *knew* him?" I Signed after a moment and then fell silent. "How old *are* you?" I Signed when the full implications of his simple statement struck me. _

_ "Don't rightly know, Mags," he replied. The grin that split his weathered face was delightful and almost genuine. "Can't remember anymore. Old enough, I guess." Logan seemed to be transported and, briefly, I wondered where in the labyrinth of his past the former killer had fled this time. It wasn't until he spoke that I knew. _

_ "Only meet him once," the X-Man said, lost in the mist of his reminiscence, "in Vienna, May 7, 1824. I remember the date exactly, cuz it was at the openin' o' that very Symphony." He pointed to the discarded CD laying forlorn in it's forgotten corner. The Canadian moved himself then, across the room and took a seat before the Steinway Concert Grande piano sprawling in splendor by the door. Astonished, I watched as his broad fingers began to move with authority over the keyboard. I am not usually sentimental, but I had not the heart to dispose of it. After a moment's concentration, seeing his hands command the keys, recalling the sounds of the notes he struck I realized he was playing the most famous movement of Beethoven's Ninth, the "Ode To Joy" as he talked. I let the music unfold from it's hiding place nestled deep within me. I moved closer so that I might see his face better and watch his lips move. He must have seen my consternation then for his answering smile was broad indeed. _

_ "Wanna know something funny?" I nodded, still listening to the memory of music fountaining inside my mind. I couldn't hear him but I could see that he was laughing. I very much doubt that it was a pleasant sound. _

_ "It's the only thing I can play," he confessed, mirth spilling from the perpetually guarded sanctum of his earth brown eyes. "Took me ten years o' practice but I finally learned it. Can't play a single note o' nothin' else. Told ya these hands ain't good for much but killin' ..." He played on while I contemplated a man who could spend a decade

learning to play a single piece of music with no interest in attempting any other composition. With more than my usual store of patience these days, I waited for him to continue. After a lifetime of rhetoric, I have, at last learned the daunting nature of silence. It's where I live now. _

_ "My boss was the Archbishop of Salzburg," he remarked and I could see the distaste in his eyes. "A real piece o' work, that one. Schweinhund*. His own language's got the perfect word to describe him. Bastard had the morals of a slug. I hated his guts. But he sure as hell needed a bodyguard and I sure as hell needed a job." I watched as Logan began to attack the keyboard, a loving assault, as if he might somehow convince himself with this music that there was joy in the world. Memory grabbed him with relentless talons and shook him with a cold embrace. _

_ "Hey," the small man observed philosophically, " A man's gotta make a living, right? And if the hypocritical bastard turned my stomach, well ... there's a lot worse things than a cheesy boss, trust me. I put up with Cyke and Charlie, too." Logan recalled to me that he'd almost been relieved when the churchman had informed him of the impending musical debut. The whole city had been a buzz with it. More than twelve years had passed since Maestro Beethoven had graced the world with one of his compositions in 1812. Rumors were rife that the Master had lost his touch, that the great composer had been unbalanced, overtaken by some mysterious tragedy. The whole of his native land awaited the coming debut with no small amount of speculation, eager to see the fall of the mighty. Logan remembered without effort some of the more spiteful gossip _

_ "He mourns his sister-in-law," whispered some. "He was her lover for years, you know! Oh yes, it's true! Years! Cuckolding his own brother, poor Karl! Shame!" _

_ "He's gone mad!" insisted others. "He was never very stable ... "

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_ Logan lay his hands in his lap and turned to face me. _

_ "Hearin' that music for the first time was like bein' born again," he said. "I felt like I'd been washed clean. There was a reason for things again ... it was almost -" _

_ "... almost as if a world with such beauty in it might be worth living in ..." I finished for him fingers flying, then waited for him to settle into his story again. He smiled his gratitude. _

_ "The Theater-An-Der-Wien's one o' those cultural tombs that great artists get condemned to; it's big and fancy like a grave marker and about as cheery. Ol' Logan sniffed the air once and almost upchucked on the smell of Kulture. I hated the place on sight and I was plenty pissed at my boss about it. Archie and me had seats on the center aisle, though. Great view, I gotta tell ya. If ya like that sort o' thing. Ain't my style." I had to smile at that. The vision of the rustic Logan perched among the splendors of a Royal Court like a hawk among the peacocks was amusing if not edifying. _

_ "There was enough perfume drenched satin and lace floatin' around the place to gag a maggot," he continued. "And that was just the men. They were expecting The Emperor Frederick Wilhelm and the Empress, ya

see, so the City Fathers o' Vienna had laid out ton's o' money to spruce the whole city up. Hey, the Symphony was dedicated to him so why not? When the Countess Von Bremen made a pass at me I almost forgot about Choir -Boy Archie. Course, that woulda been a lot easier if she hadn't been sixty-five and about the size of the city her hubby larded it over. I didn't give a damn when Archie got pissed at me cuz the Viscountess zum Hollenzolleran kept sending me Champagne. Damn bubbles still make me sneeze. I drank the crap anyway just to see Archie grind his teeth at me. By the time we were ready, finally, to sit down 'His Grace' was a sorry sight. No big surprise when I ended up sittin' on Archie's left side with the rest o' the rabble." His smile was not pleasant. "I love it when a plan comes together," he quoted as if he expected me to understand the reference. My blank face must have disabused him of that quaint notion _

_ "That's one of the things I like about you, Maggsie," he said and his face was quite serious. "You're the only guy I know who's got less of a sense o' humor than me." I frowned. I've been told I'm rather good at that. In any case, Wolverine found it expedient to carry on with his tale. _

_ "Back in those days composer's always conducted their own pieces, so when Beethoven came on stage to do that there was some polite applause. Archie whispered to me, 'Now we shall see!' and I shushed him before I knew what I was doin'. I've seen brighter storm clouds than his face right about then but he didn't say anything. There ain't many advantages to havin' a mug like this but it does shut people up when I ain't happy. Orchestra Meister Kliment handed his baton to Beethoven, The Master struck a pose and the music started. Damn that sounds lame, don't it? Ain't never been very good with words. That music thundered, it flowed, it whispered until finally it reached right into the ol' ticker and remolded it like it was clay. 'Fore long I wasn't the only one gapin' like a fish outta water. All around the Hall people sat stock still like they couldn't move, terrified by all that beauty. Anything really beautiful is like that. It always scares the crap right outta people. But I noticed somethin' right away. Beethoven's direction wasn't in time with the music the orchestra was playin'." _

_ I almost decided to leave then. To abandon Logan and his troubling tale in the dust of my pride. I knew the story, of course. I remembered the end and I could find no comfort in it. But perhaps I have let go of too many of my Dreams. Whatever I may feel about Charles, friend or foe, he has never given up on his own Dream. I doubt he ever will. It was Wolverine and not Charles who held me back, though. He grabbed my hand. _

_ "You can't run away yet, bub," he Signed slowly and clearly, lest I should mistake his intent. "I'm just gettin' to the good part." I shrugged off his hand fiercely. But, in spite of myself, I did not leave. I would hear his story to it's inevitable end. I have never been a coward and bravery does not consist of a lack of fear. A fearless man is an ignorant fool who will soon be a *dead* ignorant fool. No, a brave man is one who has mastered his fear. As I have. Logan began to play again. _

_ "Now, I don't know jack about music, Mags, but I *do* know timing. Beethoven's timin' was startin' to drift off. And he was gettin' further and further ahead of his musicians. You ever get that sinkin' feelin' in the pit o' yer stomach when ya *know* somethin' bad is

gonna happen and their ain't spit ya can do to stop it? Sure ya have. It didn't take a musical genius to realize that Ol' Ludwig was gonna finish his conducting before the musicians finished his symphony ... And the audience was gonna laugh. Damn but they were gonna enjoy laughing at him! *This* was what most o' them had come to see: failure and humiliation. It made me kinda sick to think about it. But ya know what? Mostly it pissed me off. You know about bein' pissed don't ya, Maggsie? After all that beauty it just wasn't right to have it spoiled by something like this. Right about then I started to hope real hard that no one else would notice. If you had to put a fancy name on it I guess you'd have to say I was prayin' ... Ain't done that in a way long time. Waste o' time and breath, mostly. But then I figure you know that, huh? But, sure enough, good old Archie looked to be completely clueless. 'Why?' I couldn't figure it out, 'What the hell is wrong with him? Is he drunk? Or is he crazy as they say he is?' Then I remembered another one o' the vicious rumors floatin' around Vienna. And I knew it was Gospel. He was deaf. He couldn't hear note one o' the music he was conducting. I pretty much decided to cut and run, then. Wish I could put a fancier, more genteel name to it, but hey, if I ain't anything else I'm an honest man. I didn't want to see this. Too late, though. Archie grabbed hold of me and almost lost his hand for his trouble. He tugged me back down into my chair with a whispered snarl. I was gettin' ready to relieve him o' *both* his hands when it happened." I could see him draw in a deep breath and I realized then, perhaps for the first time that he was not enjoying this. Whether by reason of my discomfort or for his own personal reasons who may say? Not I. He didn't miss a note of that glorious music, though. Not one. _

_ "Beethoven was done conducting but the orchestra kept playing for a bit. Not long, even if it did seem like forever to me. Long enough, though. Everybody could see and even Archie had it figured out by now. That's what finally did it. That smug, stupid grin o' his. Like he'd know good music if it backtracked him and bit him on the butt. Well, me either but that ain't the point, know what I mean?" I nodded slowly. But I did not smile. I had no desire to goad him to anger. I could see his gnarled hands dutifully pound the keys. He was right. They were not made for music. But for a brief instant I could see the patience and strength of will that had driven them to their seemingly useless task of mastering so foreign a thing as Beethoven's "Ode To Joy" and they were quite beautiful. _

_ "The audience started to buzz like a horde o' mosquitos about then, looking at Beethoven and then checking out their fellow music lovers to see if anybody knew what was goin' on. What had happened? They couldn't figure it out either. For a second I thought I was gonna be sick and, well, if I was gonna embarrass myself like that Archie's shiny clean white Archbishop suit looked like a prime target to me. But I changed my mind and stood up. When I started to clap I was alone. But not for long. In about two seconds everybody was on their feet slappin' their hands together like nobody's business; like their lives depended on it or somthin'. We shook the rafters and made that joint ring. Even Archie at my side, glaring at me like I was the Anti-Christ, was clappin'; and not fer a second understandin' why. But, of course, Beethoven couldn't know that. He couldn't hear the love for the beauty he'd created pour out of his audience; he had his back to us. He had to know that something bad had happened. He could *see* the musicians were still playing after he'd done his bit, right? Christ! He looked real small standing on that stage, all alone and humiliated. His shoulders slumped and he kinda collapsed in on

himself like he wanted to disappear awful bad. For a minute I was afraid the applause was gonna die down and he'd never see it. Then somethin' happened. Somethin' ... beautiful. Almost as beautiful as Beethoven's music. The primera soloist, Damisella Caroline Unger, who was a pretty hot singin' ticket just then, walked slowly to his side then gentle like turned him around so's he could see our joy in his "Ode To Joy" ... His face lit up like one o' them chandeliers hangin' overhead. Just then, I think he was probably the single most beautiful human being I've ever seen. That was when he decided to live again, I'm pretty sure. There was a place for him in the world, after all, deaf as he was. Just like there was a place for me." He looked at me and his hands lifted from the Steinway's keyboard and began to Sign.. Unless I am much mistaken he wanted to be very sure that I understood this next part. _

_ "Slipping away in a big crowd ain't hard. Archie would be looking for me, but I was past caring. I knew that I just had to see him again. He had something to tell me, I sensed it same as I can smell. I almost missed him. He was already on his way out the door, dragging along his nephew, the fickle little bastard. It hadn't crossed my mind until I saw him that I didn't have the vaguest idea how to talk to him. Sign was pretty rough in them days and, a lot like you, Ol' Ludwig stunk at readin' lips. I got pretty frantic, I guess, searching my coat for some scrap o' paper - anything! - to scribble on. I think he understood how important it was to me. He didn't say a word but he handed me a pad of paper and a charcoal stick. I scribbled my message in a frenzy and handed him the paper. Couldn't tell you why, but the answer was real damned important to me. He looked kinda peaceful when he read my question. That's when he told me, 'I'll hear it in Heaven.' He left pretty quickly so he didn't see what happened next." _

_ Logan seemed to have exhausted himself with such a long reminiscence. I gave him the privacy of his own thoughts for long moments, letting the nearness of my body speak my camaraderie for me.. The Canadian began to play again, coaxing beauty from the fine piano before him with determined if unskilled fingers. I held my silence. There was more. I was sure of it. With a last loving note Logan bade farewell to Ludwig Von Beethovan and his Chorale Symphony.

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_ "Later, at the Reception," he grinned, "I got drunk with Crown Prince Rudolf who just *might* be in need o' a bodyguard if he could work things out with Daddy the King ... Archie and I had a big ol' fight. Told him to kiss my rosy red and he fired me. Imagine it, bub! There I was, unemployed, flat broke and I didn't give a damn! I was *free*! Like Ol' Ludwig himself. He died three years later but I remember bein' happy. I ain't never been very religious, Mags, but somehow I figured he was finally gonna hear what he'd created. And I was free." _

_ We regarded one another for long moments before I finally spoke. It is difficult to convey weariness with just your hands. That malaise of spirit echoes in the voice but is often reduced to mere laziness otherwise. But perhaps Logan saw it in my eyes for he did not miss it. _

_ "Why did you come here?" I asked. "Why have you told me this story?" Logan patted his jacket in search of one of his ever present cheroots. My stern look may have dissuaded him. _

_ "Yer a survivor, Mags," he Signed. "It's one o' the things *you* do best. You've lived through everything they could throw at ya, the Krauts, Cortez, Alpha, even Chuck ... and every time you've come back stronger than before, spittin' in their eyes. Ol' Ludwig knew about survival, too, bub. And so do I. You can lick this thing if ya try. Everybody ends up where you are now, sooner or later. If they live long enough. It ain't a hard fight to win. Ya just havta be willin' to pay the price is all." _

_ I looked at his many scars where I had torn the metal from out of his body. Oh yes, Logan knew about the price of things. _

_ I watched his retreating back all the way out of my Sanctuary and I followed his path with my surveillance cameras long after he had left me. Lost in thought, I am not sure how long it was before I contracted Theresa. _

_ "Young woman," I asked via the magic of computer technology, "do you think it might be possible to increase my language lessons to twice a week?" _

_ She has been amazed at the increase in my progress in learning Sign. My gift for languages has not deserted me, it seems. And I have always spoken with my hands have I not? The lip reading is a little harder but still I persevere. Yes, there are yet times when I struggle with the cold grip of despair. _

_ But then I remember Logan's scars and Beethoven's moment of glory.

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_ The End _

_ * German for "pig-dog" _

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End
file.